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THE LODGING-HOUSE VOTE IN NEW YORK.

THE lodging-house—distinct from the hotel proper—plays an important part in New York politics, while at the same time it presents a curious and interesting phase of Metropolitan life. For the payment in advance of ten to fifty cents, the lodger can be accommodated with a bunk in a partitioned room, occupied by many others in common tenancy; or he can indulge in the luxury of a single bed, clean towel, and fresh water for his morning ablutions. These caravansaries are the growth of the last twenty years, and those of the lower grade are situated in the slums of the city. To visit them is one of the favored incidents of the new fad, “slumming,” recently borrowed by fashionable society here from abroad, where it has been indulged in as a sort of philanthropic recreation for several years.

Prior to the year 1867, the lodging-houses were few in number and practically uncontrolled by local authority or supervision. About that time public attention became directed to them and laws were enacted looking towards the amelioration of the condition of their inmates, and to prevent the breeding of pestilence in the cramped and unhealthy quarters in which they existed. The proprietor of the lodging-house is now bound by law to provide accommodations, and the health authorities of the city can only issue permits for those houses where the dimensions will afford each lodger not less than 600 cubic feet of air space—a regulation which is practically ignored in those of the lower grade.

There are in all about 300 lodging-houses in New York, licensed as such by the Health Department, which are allowed under their permits to accommodate 17,530 persons. Those issued since October 1st, 1886, alone afford accommodation for 2,480 persons. Deducting this from the total, we have 15,050 persons who, if these houses were full, and if the lodgers were all *bona fide* voters and registered, would represent eight per cent. of all the electors

in this city. More than twenty per cent. of this total actually voted at the last general election.

The sanitary condition of these places has improved under health regulations ; but in the inverse ratio of this improvement they have become a dangerous element in municipal politics. They have become the centres in which corrupt and fraudulent voters herd together immediately before each election, and shamelessly hold their votes to the highest bidder of any party or faction. Three thousand one hundred and seventy-five electors cast their ballots at the election in November, 1886, from 256 of these hives of the franchise. That they were not of the order of men who make up the greatness of the State goes without saying ; that they were mainly composed of the vagrant lost to every sentiment of manhood and honor, who subsists principally by mendicancy and petty thieving, tramping the country and suburbs during the summer, and gravitating towards the city with the return of cool weather, does not admit of contradiction. Very rarely indeed is the workingman proper to be found among the tenants of the lodging-house.

It is questionable if the great bulk of these lodgers are entitled to vote, as an examination shows that they are mainly thirty-day voters in the election district. The elective franchise, which is held so lightly by many of our more intelligent and wealthy citizens, is highly esteemed by the voters of the lodging-house. To them it represents not so much a principle, a right, or a privilege, as a pecuniary possibility, differing in value as the canvass may be grave or interesting to the captains of the disciplined workers of the machines in the various Assembly and Election Districts. The workers recognize the lodging-house vote as a potential factor in deciding the fate of candidates ; and, while it is but just to admit that it is more often used to decide the fate of the Alderman in his district than any other office-seeker, practically the result is to determine the election of other candidates who are bunched with this local officer. In this sense it may even be claimed that a President was elected in 1884 by the lodging-house vote in this city. There is no desire in making this assertion to detract from the just deserts of the Stalwart Republicans, the Mugwumps, or of the Reverend Doctor Burchard, but as these votes can be concretely estimated, and are always safely

delivered for the proper consideration, there are substantial grounds for claiming this credit for the inmates of the lodging-houses in this city. The potentiality of this vote is acknowledged by the politicians of both parties, and it is sought by both ; still, it is practically controlled almost in its entirety by the Democratic organizations, who secure this advantage by reason of the location of these places. The vote of last year was smaller than that cast from the lodging-houses in many former years. 1886 was an off year, the only State officer running being the Judge of the Court of Appeals. In the Presidential contests of 1880 and 1884, it was asserted that from 8,000 to 10,000 persons voted from the lodging-houses of this city. To prove this statement now would be a matter of some difficulty, and would involve a great deal of labor ; but it is fairly sustained by the logic of progressive statistics, and by the facts as we find them at the present time. The computation of the lodging-house vote given above is made from official sources, and is strictly confined to those houses which appear in the permit books of the Board of Health as licensed lodging-houses. It does not include private lodging-houses, which are beyond domiciliary visits. It represents only those who voted. The registry of this vote was necessarily larger. Considered by districts, it shows the natural preponderance towards Democracy. Of the thirteen Assembly districts in which this vote is cast, four are Republican and nine Democratic. The strong Democratic Second District heads the list with 1,018 votes. The Eighth (so long under the domination of the leader of the Republican machine) takes the second place in numerical order, being entitled, however, to the credit of the largest individual house vote in the city, the domicile in question being No. 41 Bowery, with a record of 142 votes. With space to accommodate many times less, the vote from this one house is two and a half times larger than that from the Fifth Avenue, the Windsor, and the Hoffman House combined, and is almost one-fourth of the lodging-house vote in the whole district, viz., 564. The Democratic Third District sheltered 493 of these voters. The First, Fifth, and Sixth Assembly Districts, all Democratic, respectively voted 291, 255, and 141, while the Ninth, Seventh, Fourth, Tenth, Twelfth, Sixteenth, Eighteenth, and Twenty-first are represented in a lesser degree. The workers for the machines recognize the value of these votes, and provide for them in the disbursements of the campaign. Indeed, it has been

claimed that any closely contested election in which there were three tickets running, could be carried for the side securing the lodging-house vote. The arrangements for the lodging-house vote are made generally by the men in charge of the election districts. It is secured by purchase—pure and simple—and when completed, the voters are marched to the poles in squads of twos, threes, and fours, depending on the ability of their conductor to hold them together, and prevent interference from others. They are compelled to hold their right hand up with ballots exposed, so that, in the expressive language of the adroit campaigner, they can do no “funny business in changing ballots.” Their ballots are taken generally unchallenged ; or, if challenged, their vote is sworn in. Their reward is paid them by another worker—generally quite a superior person—after the vote has been deposited to the satisfaction of their conductor.

At times, the lodging-house keeper is himself a politician, and then he makes his own arrangements with the party representative, or the candidate personally, for the votes of his lodgers. In one case of which the writer was informed in his investigations, the competition was unusually active on the local candidates, and the lodging-house keeper locked his voters up and kept them under duress, until he had voted them all in convenient squads.

That this vote is decisive is beyond dispute. It decided the election of one Mayor since 1880, of one Congressman in 1880, of a Judge of a Court of Record in 1884, by its vote in one Assembly District, and in the same year it elected the Alderman who was first convicted for bribery in office.

The investigation of this subject opens up an interesting field for discussion by the municipal reformer and political economist. It is apparent that some steps should be taken to lessen the opportunities for bribery thus afforded by aggregated masses of easily corrupted voters. To meet the evil and provide a remedy, its existence must be judicially admitted ; yet, during the last seven years not one conviction has been had for bribing a voter. That few cases are brought to public notice, and practically none to trial, is due largely to the unwillingness to inform, although either party to the transaction can be a witness, but the real obstacle in the way of the prevention of this crime is the freemasonry existing between the politicians who run the machines

of both parties. Their enthusiasm and personal interest in the results of the campaign have blunted conscience and patriotism, and the responsibility for crime is evaded by "hiring" the voter, instead of paying him for his vote in individual cases. If they fail themselves, vote-bribers will not inform on the opposition worker, who has secured the prize by a higher bid or superior adroitness.

It will be difficult, if not indeed impossible, to destroy this wholesale traffic in votes, until the honest conscientious men in both parties make up their minds to eradicate it. Not alone by creating better public sentiment on the subject, but by the more practical plan of a strict scrutiny of the lists of registered voters, challenging at the polls, and earnest co-operation of the police, must this crime be met and prevented.

The act of bribing usually requires the co-operation of three persons; the voter, the person who accompanies him to the polls to see his vote deposited (in this matter nothing is taken on trust), and the person who pays the money. To this last transaction there are but two parties, the briber and the bribed. The unity of interest is thus preserved and the oath of the one is as good as that of the other participant in the crime. The care and secrecy thus necessitated may account for the fact that during the last seven years there have been no convictions found for the bribery of voters, and as far as could be ascertained no indictments found therefor during the same time. From 1880 to 1886, both inclusive, the total convictions for all other violations of the election laws were but 20 in number. The bribing of the voter would be made more difficult were the existing laws more strictly enforced. Electioneering in the polling-place and handing the voter a ballot are misdemeanors, transgressions of law which are committed in many polling places in this city, under the very eyes of the police at every election. New laws might be passed to render more difficult the possibility of bribery at elections. Public opinion ought to be aroused on this subject, and discussion invited as to the best means of eradicating this growing evil. To the Legislature in session, and to the Constitutional Convention, when elected, must we turn for the proper remedy to be applied.

It is not good policy in any public man to advocate a limitation of the elective franchise. The attempt made in recent years to limit the right to vote in this city on certain questions to those

electors who possessed a property qualification met with stubborn opposition and ultimate defeat. It is probable that any effort to attach an educational test to the franchise—denying it to all who cannot read or write—would meet with opposition from the demagogues in both parties; yet if this could be accomplished (and it would appear to be not a violation of the Federal Constitution for such an amendment to be adopted and submitted to the people of this State, when ratified by them), it would be of inestimable advantage to the city and State, and the dwellers therein who desire to see better methods applied to municipal, State, and social questions.

The present system of voting, intended to give the voter a secret ballot, practically does nothing of the sort. By the exercise of a little adroitness on the part of the Inspector of Elections, who is the selected officer of party, the voter's intention is easily ascertained and the vaunted inviolability of the ballot becomes a mockery. Our system is not advanced enough for the present day. We are a quarter of a century behind the age. More scientific methods are in use in younger communities, which give the elector absolute freedom of choice and the necessary secrecy, such as the very act of voting contemplates in a free community.

It is to be hoped that our Constitutional Convention will provide or suggest suitable amendments to accomplish this purpose.

HENRY A. GUMBLETON.